

TRAINING NOTES



Thoughts on Physical Training

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The U.S. Army has developed an extraordinarily comprehensive and sophisticated physical fitness training philosophy and doctrine. Manifestations of this system are such outstanding references as Field Manual (FM) 21-20, *Physical Fitness Training*, such innovative concepts as master fitness trainers (MFTs), clearly defined Army-wide standards of performance, and a junior-leader professional development program that reinforces the importance of fitness and teaches the skills necessary to effectively train subordinates.

Obviously, our efforts to produce physically fit soldiers are brought into focus by particular training events, the key one being daily physical training (PT). Total fitness also includes other factors—weight control, diet and nutrition, control of substance abuse, and stress management—but it is daily PT that generally receives the most attention from leaders.

PT formation is special because it marks the one time of the day when a unit is mostly in one location, when leaders are not dispersed for various reasons, and when almost everyone has the same mission statement—Participate in PT. While distractors and unforeseen demands play havoc with most other

aspects of scheduled training, PT goes as planned, almost as surely as the sun rises. Leaders who take advantage of this have an excellent opportunity to use it as a means of improving daily (at least while in garrison) two essential ingredients of unit effectiveness—unit discipline and cohesion, and the proficiency

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of junior leaders at planning and conducting training to standard and exercising the art of command.

In an attempt to pursue these more extensive goals, I offer here an examination of various principles and techniques that junior leaders might consider in formulating their PT programs. Nothing that follows should be perceived as

inconsistent with or contrary to the Army's physical fitness training literature. What I'm talking about is the form, or the packaging, that will help us further other goals as important as physical fitness without loss or compromise. In fact, at a time when the Army is undeniably facing considerable stress from shrinking resources and internal changes, the points raised here may be more relevant today than at any time in the recent past. During periods of significant change, good leaders must seek to maintain coherence by rallying their units around certain routines and, in this sense, PT provides just such an opening.

Discipline and Cohesion

Company commanders and first sergeants should ensure maximum attendance at PT formations. Only the absolutes—guard duty and the like—should be considered legitimate exemptions. And battalion headquarters must set the example and the tone. A battalion staff may make a case for needing a clerk to type something during PT, the command group should see that this doesn't happen. Additionally, the battalion executive officer (XO) should have the staff officers assemble as a section at the headquarters company PT

formation, again to send the message that PT is mandatory for everyone, regardless of rank or position.

The battalion commander and command sergeant major (CSM) should be visible throughout the company areas at formation time. In the process, they will also learn how much of a priority PT really is in each company. When a walk through an orderly room reveals a junior leader "preparing for the day's training" (doing what should have been done yesterday), the company commander should be reminded of the battalion's policy.

We often unintentionally drive down participation by failing to question practices that interfere:

One example is changing guard and staff duty positions around 0900, causing members of both shifts to be absent from PT. The CSM can easily fix this problem.

Another example is scheduling sick call during or immediately after PT formation. Unit sick call should begin 30 minutes before PT. Those who need only minor treatment can still be present for PT; those with more significant ailments will be unaffected; and those who *want* to miss PT will be discouraged by the need to rise earlier.

A third example concerns the policy (or lack of it) regarding soldiers who do not participate in PT but are present for duty later in the day (for example, those returning from sick call referrals to the Troop Medical Clinic). Scheduling make-up PT at 1600 may or may not be practical, but if it can be done regularly (including PT for those on profiles), attendance at the morning formation should improve. A commander's example and virtual intolerance of excuses will lead to higher rates of participation in unit PT.

Because uniformity builds cohesion, units should wear the prescribed PT attire without exception. During the winter months in cold climates, soldiers may want to wear varying amounts of clothing, but the outer garments should remain uniform. Rules should be specific (white socks worn up to mid-calf, for example). The goal here is to create

a sense of identity among soldiers and to teach junior leaders to enforce the standards. If the "little" but highly visible things aren't being done correctly, chances are the much tougher and less visible things probably aren't being done at all.

Additionally, junior leaders must insist that personal hygiene be completed before PT formation. This may not seem controversial, but few CSMs who walk through company areas can report full compliance. Many junior leaders either don't check or don't see anything wrong with not shaving before PT. When we ignore what is before our eyes, we are not establishing a climate of discipline or teaching our subordinates to emphasize discipline. (We do shave in the field as soon as we rise.)

Finally, commanders should never cancel PT because of inclement weather. Some modifications may be justified (such as when roads are so icy as to be

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unsafe for running), but changing plans because of rain or cold does not build the collective sense of toughness and unit spirit. Certainly, safety and common sense must prevail, but they should not be accepted as excuses for seeking the easy way out.

Thoughts on Execution

Leaders who rely on extreme formality in PT may be emphasizing discipline at the expense of fitness. Clearly, we must strive to achieve a balance. On the other hand, those who argue that formality (which fosters discipline and cohesion) is in conflict with the pursuit of fitness are as wrongheaded as those who stress all form and no substance.

When directing their soldiers, leaders must strictly adhere to the standards

found in FM 22-5, *Drill and Ceremonies*, and Chapter 7 (Physical Fitness Leadership and Instructor Training) of FM 21-20. Squads strolling instead of marching before beginning a run; soldiers not coming to parade rest upon hearing a preparatory command; calisthenics being performed on the basis of individual style; or units moving into an extended rectangular formation, apparently oblivious to the dictates of FM 21-20, are all indicators of a chain of command that has somehow separated PT and basic collective discipline. Those who believe that such practices can be ignored for the moment—and then somehow captured in the course of the day that lies ahead—are kidding themselves.

Physical training, except perhaps road marching, should always conclude with a cool-down phase. A well-proven technique is for commanders to require their units to conduct five minutes of drill and ceremonies (D&C) as part of their cool-down activities after completing their principal physical training. PT marks that defining moment when every left foot in the unit hits the ground at the same time; the sense of solidarity that results from a few minutes of small-unit D&C, conducted aggressively and precisely, is worth the investment.

There are, of course, excellent forms of PT in which units are broken down. Ability-group runs are a good example. But leaders should ensure that such groups remain in effect only for the time required to complete the tasks for which they were formed. For example, before conducting an ability-group run, a platoon should warm up and exercise as a unit; then, upon completing the run, the various ability groups should meet in the company area, form up as a platoon again, and conduct D&C and cool-down.

In a similar vein, commanders and first sergeants should be cautious about exiling the injured to "profile PT." Peer pressure has tremendous healing power, and soldiers on profiles should exercise with their units (within limits of common sense). Those who are unable to

run should engage in an alternate form of aerobic exercise (walking, bicycling) if possible, and join their comrades again when the unit returns for D&C and cool-down.

Ability-group runs are unquestionably a better form of PT than unit runs, but unit runs foster unit spirit and promote superior performance. A well-organized unit PT session consisting of warm-up exercises and calisthenics, followed by a run to a specific time and distance standard, can pay tremendous dividends. Battalion PT should be conducted once a month (just before a long weekend or block leave), and company PT perhaps once or twice a month. The battalion commander or CSM (or company commander or first sergeant) should extend the formation and lead the exercises, and his counterpart should then take over for the run. If a run is led by noncommissioned officers (NCOs), the commander should lead the officers on a separate run.

The commander or CSM (or first sergeant) should arrange in advance to call forward one outstanding junior officer, NCO, or soldier from each subordinate unit to lead a specified calisthenic during the exercise phase. The accomplishment of the individual called forward (such as Division Soldier of the Quarter) should be announced to the formation, and the members of the soldier's unit encouraged to recognize the soldier.

Commanders might also consider allowing top-notch performers, such as Expert Infantryman's Badge (EIB) recipients, to carry or run directly behind the colors. Upon completion of a battalion run, the commander or CSM should form the staff on the side of the road with the colors and have the units march by as they return to their company areas. Commanders and their NCO counterparts should also use unit PT as an opportunity to talk with their soldiers. Admittedly, no one is going to be ready to compete in the Olympic decathlon event by virtue of his participation in company or battalion PT, but it fosters collective identity and helps validate minimum unit run standards.

Some final observations on the execution of physical training:

- Issuing to subordinates a "no-earlier-than" time for completion of PT is worth considering. Some leaders are inclined to say, "Let's finish a bit early, since we have a busy schedule today." The results are substandard PT and soldiers who are not being disciplined to complete all assigned tasks to standard.

- Modified Army Physical Fitness Tests (APFTs) must be administered to soldiers on permanent profiles in accordance with Chapter 11, FM 21-20; every assigned soldier should be treated as part of the team. The good soldier will be encouraged by the fact he's still being taken seriously, and the not-so-good soldier will learn there is no way to evade PT.

- During collective runs, formations should not turn around and go back for

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stragglers. Soldiers operating below the margin should be dealt with on their own time; don't waste the workout session of the others by executing 180-degree turns at a snail's pace in the name of "finishing as a unit." Only those who meet the standard should have the *privilege* of finishing as part of the group.

- Encourage excellence in physical fitness by making a big deal of the award of fitness badges (more than 290 points overall and more than 90 points per event on the APFT). Award the badges at unit formations, and require that they be worn on all PT uniforms. At the same time, do not tolerate substandard performance. Use remedial training (after duty hours or on Saturday mornings, if necessary) to address specific problem areas. Ensure that

bars to reenlistment are imposed as required for APFT failures or for any documented case of a soldier failing, over a period of time, to attain well-publicized and understood standards of fitness. Leaders should also make sure efficiency reports reflect superior and below-average performances in physical fitness.

- Use trends in sick-call rates as a barometer of the effectiveness of the PT program. In general, a unit with unusually high sick-call rates over an extended period probably has deep-rooted problems within its chain of command. Yet there may also be major weaknesses in the PT program itself that keep soldiers from wanting to participate. We do need to make sure there is a "cost" for electing not to participate, but the lasting solution is to pinpoint any breakdown in leadership that may be turning soldiers off or making them feel their time is being wasted. High sick-call rates often indicate poor leaders, not poor soldiers, and should be taken as a possible symptom of a shoddily run PT program.

PT, Trainers, and Leaders

The Army's training doctrine is clearly set out in the FM 25 series. Nevertheless, developing competent trainers who can apply this doctrine is still one of the toughest challenges for commanders and senior NCOs. Given the turmoil of daily life in a unit, converting principles into practice is often an elusive goal. The predictability, simplicity, structure, and visibility of PT make it the ideal foundation on which to build efforts to mold proficient junior leader trainers.

Commanders, CSMs, and first sergeants should be alarmed when they observe young leaders who are "winging it" at PT instead of planning; who are unable to articulate a task, condition, and standard; or who haven't rehearsed their mission or obtained the resources necessary to accomplish it. If a junior leader isn't doing a good job on something as basic as PT, his superiors can expect major problems in the tougher (and usually less visible) training

assignments. In fact, the correlation between good small-unit PT and good small-unit training is so strong that the performance of junior leaders in planning and executing PT can be used to judge their overall ability as trainers.

PT programs, like all dimensions of training, are planned and executed in accordance with the doctrine outlined in the FM 25 series. Through near-term planning, commanders formulate and approve the daily PT plans that will appear on training schedules. So far, so good. Progression beyond this point, however, often becomes problematic.

The following indicators may be symptoms of a breakdown in the system:

A platoon leader queried about his planned PT for the day cannot answer in more detail than "Squad PT." Leaders must approve their subordinates' training plans and stay informed of their units' whereabouts and activities. Decentralized execution is not equivalent to allowing a subordinate to go off and do things his own way.

A squad leader claims he will be conducting a four-mile run in 36 minutes running nine-minute miles (plus or minus 30 seconds each) but cannot confirm that the route he has chosen is, in fact, four miles in length. Is he (or his platoon leader) aware of the need to measure performance against precise standards or, for that matter, to do his homework before standing up in front of soldiers and trying to train them?

A junior leader races off to the post gymnasium with his element for a weight-lifting session, only to find the gym closed in preparation for a post tournament. A company commander might be inclined to be charitable and say, "Those things happen," but those things shouldn't happen and can't be tolerated if we're to develop responsible trainers. A company commander who deployed his unit to a live fire range, only to find it closed for repairs, would be criticized; a junior leader, within his own domain, should be required to be just as meticulous in his own planning.

An effective means of reinforcing training doctrine at PT is to require offi-

cers and NCOs to formally announce the task, conditions, and standard at the outset of every PT session.

For example:

Task: Conduct squad PT.

Conditions: Outdoors, in daylight, in summer PT uniform.

Standards: Conduct three minutes of stretching and five minutes of calisthenics in accordance with FM 21-20; complete a four-mile run in 36 minutes running nine-minute miles (plus or minus 30 seconds each) with 100 percent completion; conduct five minutes of D&C cool-down in accordance with the standards of FM 22-5; and conduct three minutes of stretching, again in accordance with FM 21-20.

Some would contend that this is excessively formal, but in doing it, we remind ourselves, our subordinates, and our soldiers that all meaningful training is built around objective tasks, conditions, and standards. If a chain of com-

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mand vigorously enforces an SOP that requires junior leaders to announce, execute, and enforce tasks, conditions, and standards at every PT session, the effects will spill over into other forms of training as well.

PT also gives us an excellent opportunity to make sure our junior leaders know that "imaginative" training also comes with the qualifications of "meaningful" and "conducted to a standard." There is simply no reason for PT programs to be dull and unexciting. Our creative young officers and NCOs, if given latitude and encouragement, will come up with effective innovations.

Yet the desire to do something different often becomes an end in itself, and we lose track of training objectives and standards. For instance, the platoon leader who includes strenuous rope

skipping in a workout session should be commended for originality. But if this event occurs the day after a tough road march, and is offered as no more than a trial of endurance, that same leader should be counseled. Smart leaders can adhere to basics even while spicing up the training. This skill can be fine-tuned by commanders and senior NCOs who remain vigilant at PT and monitor their subordinates carefully.

Much of what I have covered so far implicitly promotes the development of leadership among junior officers and NCOs. But to this I add that a chain of command from battalion commander on down should consistently use PT as an opportunity to assess subordinates, enforce standards, and measure the climate in different units. The same leaders who frequently lament that they have no time to escape their headquarters and be out among their subordinates can often be seen running by themselves at PT or with a member of their staff, which is a truly wasted opportunity. It should be unit SOP that no one—battalion or company commander or staff officer, CSM or first sergeant—will take PT alone.

Moreover, when a senior leader joins one of his units for a PT session, he should always provide informal feedback (both the positive and "needs improvement") directly to the officer or NCO in charge, after the soldiers have been released. A good technique is to have junior leaders first evaluate themselves. In a well-trained unit, most of them can identify their own problems. Commanders must be informed of serious deficiencies, and excellence recognized through a variety of methods—praising the leader in front of his soldiers after PT; sending an informal handwritten note through the leader's chain of command; or mentioning the individual by name at a training meeting.

Physical training is also one of the best forums in which to train and test young soldiers. It makes good sense for officers and NCOs to call on their soldiers occasionally to lead exercises, call cadence on runs, take charge during the

cool-down D&C periods, or even lead for most of a PT period. Too often, however, soldiers are randomly and spontaneously selected for such missions, which is unfair to them if they fail at the task. For anything more than the most routine assignments, young soldiers should be forewarned and rehearsed and should be critiqued on their performance afterward. When we say we're engaging in leadership development training, our actions should reflect that development.

Finally, since a leader is responsible for guaranteeing the fitness of his assigned soldiers, PT is an excellent medium through which to improve and assess the ability of the junior officers and NCOs to motivate and guide their subordinates. When confronted with an otherwise good soldier who is slightly overweight and having trouble with the APFT, a company commander and first sergeant—before accepting the problem as their own—should ask the platoon leader and platoon sergeant what they have done to help solve it. If there is no evidence that the team and squad leaders have been actively working with the soldier after duty hours or on Saturdays, no record of counseling, no special PT program initiated for him, it is the concerned members of the chain of command who need counselling on their own responsibilities and obligations.

In sum, physical training is a very observable and measurable way to teach leaders their basic duties and the meaning of commitment. Moreover, small-unit outcomes—both excellent (a high number of soldiers earning the fitness badge) and substandard (below-average APFT scores and percentage passing)—should be reflected on the responsible leaders' efficiency reports. Such follow-up, again, promotes and reinforces leader responsibility.

Although my intent here has been to consider PT from the perspectives of building discipline and cohesion and developing trainers and leaders, I offer several observations that pertain primarily to the substance of a unit's PT program:

Organized athletics are not a form of PT and not a cost-effective way of conducting it. Too many breaks in action defeat aerobic conditioning goals, the lack of skill of many participants limits intensity, and the atmosphere is too informal. Team sports should be saved for unit athletic days and garrison afternoons when the senior leaders have to be somewhere else.

Road march frequently but sensibly. I doubt that any infantry unit in the history of warfare has ever been defeated because all its soldiers couldn't run two miles together in 16 minutes. On the other hand, some units have suffered reverses because they couldn't move from one point to another in a specified time. Despite our fascination with running and jogging, road marching is still much more relevant to the combat readiness of the infantry. (I'm not denying the contribution to our fitness that aro-

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bic conditioning makes; I'm only saying we need tough, steady marchers more than we need marathon runners). Units in garrison should march at least weekly. Commanders must also ensure that road marches to standard are incorporated throughout field exercises; it is surprising how frequently units deploy to the field without planning or conducting any PT.

When feasible, try to avoid using trucks to get to and from the field, or to move from range to range. Infantry is footmobile and must be trained accordingly. In addition, road marches must be sensible. The EIB road march standard may make sense in the context of a demanding individual skills test, but it should not be adopted as a division-mandated small-unit norm. The

EIB standard requires speed marching, which tears the body down and causes units to arrive at their destination ill-prepared to fight. Infantry leaders should be trained to pace and conserve their soldiers as judiciously as they would complex pieces of equipment with attendant "do not exceed" rates of operation.

Finally, soldiers should always road march with the gear they expect to carry in combat. In garrison, it may not be possible to draw weapons during the time allocated before PT, but "pre-signing" can usually overcome this problem. Units marching around in PT garb, wearing boots, and carrying rucksacks make for amusing sights, but they aren't training under the conditions they will encounter in combat.

Conduct rigorous aerobic exercises or road marches on Mondays. No amount of admonition will prevent some soldiers from consuming prodigious amounts of alcohol on weekends, but the certainty of a taxing run or road march on Monday can be a deterrent, at least to those contemplating a weekend binge.

Use master fitness trainers as advisors, not principal instructors. MFTs, on the basis of the commander's fitness objectives, must play an important advisory role in the development of long-term, short-term, and near-term training plans. They are also adept at conducting "train the trainer" sessions for junior leaders. Employing MFTs primarily to serve as principal instructors for unit PT is akin to hiring a world class coach to lead a team's warm-up exercises.

Ensure quality control when preparing for and administering APFTs. Commanders and senior NCOs are frequently stunned when large numbers of their soldiers fail to attain EIB APFT standards (minimum score 240 points, at least 70 points per event) on the day of the test. After all, in the ramp-up to the EIB test, company commanders and first sergeants all reported such excellent results that the APFT wasn't considered among the potential "killer" events. As an antidote, leaders and commanders up to battalion level

should organize and administer impartial practice and actual APFTs throughout the year. For example, a rifle company practice test might be organized by the first sergeant using selected NCOs and PT fitness badge holders as testers. The results should be tabulated down to squad level and disseminated throughout the unit. The improved integrity of the test, along with the pressure of the competition, will lead to a steady improvement in unit fitness (and to fewer surprises on the first day of an EIB test).

If a commander wants to take stock of

a unit's discipline and cohesion, as well as the training and leadership skills of its chain of command, all he has to do is join that unit for daily PT. This is a unit's most focused and predictable routine training, and it is safe to assume that if the basics (in the broadest sense) aren't being emphasized here, they are being neglected elsewhere as well.

Commanders who are truly committed to shaping combat ready units will establish PT programs that seek to accomplish two goals: to produce physically fit soldiers and to promote discipline and teamwork and develop

top-notch trainers and leaders. Through practice, a chain of command will find these objectives mutually reinforcing.

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Staff Training

Observations from the NTC

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Observations at the National Training Center (NTC) indicate that battalion and brigade task forces do not conduct enough realistic and tough task force level multiechelon training. Home-station training for most units focuses primarily on warfighting skills that test individual, crew, platoon, and some company mission essential tasks. Staff level skills, individual and collective, are trained only through combat simulations and are not measured against an exacting standard of combat conditions.

As a result, many task force staffs at the NTC lack the skills to carry out the tactical decision-making process to standard; commanders must therefore focus on controlling their units instead of commanding them. And if the commander has to spend most of his time at the main command post (CP) supervising the staff, he cannot properly supervise

the critical events that make his intent clear—such as attending subordinate unit operations order (OPORD) briefings and rehearsals. Neither can he make a firsthand assessment of the task force's preparations for combat.

Aside from a lack of training, many staff officers are also lacking in experience. The typical battalion task force at the NTC often fits the following general description:

At field-grade level, the executive officer (XO) has not served with troops for two or three years—or he has served as S-3 and still tries to do the S-3's job. The S-3 is a recent graduate of the Command and General Staff College, or was deferred from the course to take the S-3 position, and has little recent experience at task force level.

At company-grade level, the first lieutenants in the S-3 Air, S-4, S-1, fire

support officer (FSO), and S-2 positions have only recently completed—or have not yet attended—the officer advanced course and have had little or no staff experience. The chemical officer is often a second lieutenant straight from an officer basic course. The Air Defense Artillery and Engineer officers may be in their first assignments at task force level.

These staff officers may have served as shift officers in an administrative CP during unit collective training, or as range safety officers for company-team gunnery exercises, and some may have participated in orders drills but rarely during field training. Their only training in the orders process has usually been during a command post exercise (CPX) or a simulation exercise while preparing for the unit's NTC rotation.

Many leaders contend that a task